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Peace or War (?)

A VISION

By

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IN the days of the Pilgrims' coming,
In the days of the Christmas feast,
When the Prince of Peace was shown
to men

By the star that gleamed in the East,
My soul was thrilled by a vision, — 5
No dream of the midnight hours,
But a morning glimpse within the veil
That hideth the future's powers.

On the eyes of my gazing spirit
Rose the walls of my country's home, 10
With many an arch and column,
With many a tower and dome.

Untold were its stones and timbers,
All earth's commingled spoil,
And each was scarred with the chisels 15
Of daring and pain and toil.
One instant a shapeless medley,
Where a score of rival shrines
Were jostled in rude confusion,
As by demons' fell designs. 20
In the next their jarring framework
Was lost in an ordered whole,
And there rose from every roof and wall
The breath of a forming soul.

Tall shafts of a chastened beauty, 25
Instinct with the grace of yore,
Upheld rude beams which the settler's axe
Unshaped from the woodland tore.
From low, stern arches undecked and bare,
With the Pilgrims' names embossed, 30

Soared into heaven fantastic spires
By airs from the Orient tossed.
And ever the fabric shifted
With the beating of hands and feet,
Now sordid and now majestic, 35
Now ragged and now complete.

And ever through arch and portal
Streamed onward an endless crowd,
Now singing with mirth and hope and pride,
Now sullen or wailing loud. 40
The features of all were varied
With the stamp of many a land,
And the dwellers within called harshly
To block each entering band.
Then anon those tones of discord 45
In harmony seemed to blend,
And from gates and halls responsive came
The greeting of friend to friend.

And still, as that lofty portal
 Loomed clearer from off the ground, 50
I marked how its marble pediment
 Three forms heroic crowned.
Aloft on its peak stood Freedom,
 With proud and fearless gaze,
Ungirt was her striped and spangled robe, 55
 And her brows were wreathed with bays.
At her right stood bold Adventure ;
 An axe in the air he swung,
Till it seemed with his every wielding
 The temple quivered and rung. 60
On her left stood sober Order,
 Begirt with an ancient blade,
And the hilt she grasped till the sounds were
 hushed
 And the quivering framework stayed.

Beneath, as the platform's warders, 65
 Stood many a figure tall,

Each bent on some high endeavor,
One impulse among them all.
Strong Labor, with spade and anvil,
Bright Commerce with wheel and mast, 70
Dark miners with picks to burrow,
Stout fishers, with seines to cast,
Deep Science, remoulding nature,
Keen Art, bringing gold from dross,
Instruction with open volume, 75
Religion with lifted cross.
One moment all stood asunder,
As jealous each for his own,
And the next in one were they mingled,
As helpless to work alone. 80
Yet oft from their fixed attention
They turned, and with anxious eye,
Looked wistful where, beneath Freedom's feet,
Projected a balcony.
It seemed like a post of vantage, 85
For some form of might to stand,

That should range and rule those potent
crafts

By its word of high command.
And lo ! from within the temple
A clash of music rang, 90
The sweet full chords of a silver harp,
And the clarion's brazen clang.
Still clearer they pealed and echoed,
And forth through that window fair
There stepped to light beneath Freedom's
feet 95
A strange, discordant pair.

The first was a stately matron, —
Her look was kind yet bold,
And the robe was drawn o'er her bosom's
swell
With a girdle of gems and gold ; 100
Her forehead was bound with olive,
And an ivory rod she bore,

Like the master's wand who controls the
halls

Where floods of music pour.

The other a stalwart athlete, 105

Defiant and proud of mien,

And his limbs in ancient mail were clad

That flashed with a brazen sheen ;

In his hand an ebon truncheon

He wielded with haughty sign, 110

As a marshal signs to his serried troop

To charge on the hostile line.

And both on the platform's warders

The beck of a sovereign threw,

As though the toilers of every craft 115

To their high behest they drew.

Then some their tools grasped firmer,

As they sought the warrior's side,

And their faces with fiercest glow were lit

From a newborn force and pride ; 120

And some with an eager motion
To the side of the lady pressed,
And deep there shone from within their
eyes

A hunger for calm and rest,
And wavering back and forward 125
Now hero, now dame, all sought,
As though hope and fear contended,
And longing with ardor fought.

Then sounded again the bugle,
As the soldier moved to speak, 130
And I saw where many a ghastly scar
Had seamed his sunburnt cheek : —
“ I claim in this house of Freedom
That her forces and stores are mine,
Stamped as my own to spend or save 135
By this, the hero's sign.
Go back through your country's story,
And read on its every page

Mine was the call that woke to life
 The sons of a nobler age. 140
 By the blood of the Pilgrim, slaughtered
 When the red man fired his cot, —
 By the blood of the farmer, fallen
 On Freedom's birthday spot, —
 By the tars that sank in the ocean 145
 That your flag might rule its waves,
 By the shreds of blue and grey that weave
 Their carpet o'er Southern graves,
 By the sickness and toil and patience
 In prison and camp and mine, 150
 By the reckless charge and the grim retreat
 Where line was locked with line, —
 By the thousand hearts my bugle spurred
 To the bastion's dread assault,
 By the wealth untold my summons drew 155
 From the patriot merchant's vault,
 By the men that scoffed at sloth or gain
 By the women their hearts that steeled,

By the boys that sprang when they heard
 my call,
 Full-armed from their native field, — 160
That the proudest beyond the waters
 May tremble to hear your name,
That the meanest in all your borders
 Be guarded from loss and shame, —
By the stars in your crown of splendor, 165
 By the stripes that your foeman scar,
To order the home of Freedom
 Is the duty and right of War ! ”

And still as his haughty challenge
 Afar from the platform rang, 170
There thundered in hoarse approval
 The trumpet's answering clang.
And the crowd that swayed through the
 portal
 Shouted with loud acclaim,

And far through the courts and aisles and
stairs

175

Was echoed the soldier's name.

And the axe of bold Adventure

Swung free to the air on high,

And shout on shout from the warders pealed

As they caught the hero's eye : —

180

“ Lead us, thou lord of glory !

Our works and our wealth are thine !

Lead, till thou break each rival's power,

And all earth obey thy sign.”

Then clear through that shout of passion

185

‘Floated the harp's pure tone,

And the matron spoke as it died away

In music that seemed its own : —

“ I claim in this house of Freedom

That its forces and stores are mine,

190

Whom God hath marked as his handmaid

By this garland's sacred sign.

Go back through your country's story
 And read on its every page
 'Twas I that roused from the night of time 195
 The sons of a better age.
 By the axes that felled your forests,
 By the ploughs that turned your soil,
 By the wheels that have curbed your rivers,
 And made the cataracts toil; 200
 By the mines that have pierced the moun-
 tains
 To drag their wealth to the day,
 By the forge that rings and the loom that
 sings,
 And the nets that sweep the bay,
 By the arches that span the torrent, 205
 By the keels that cleave the brine,
 By the cords of steel that remotest homes
 In a network of love entwine,
 By the whispering tube that laughs at space,
 By the wire that conquers time, 210

By the searching rays through the flesh that
gaze

Revealing the tracks of crime, —

By the treasure my hands have gathered

That his would squander and spend,

By the boys I bear for their land to live 215

That yon bugle to death would send, —

By the fires and floods and famines

That your sons and your daughters fight,

By the feet that bring to sorrow and

wrong

Healing and strength and light, — 220

By the schools where your children gather,

By the spires where your fathers prayed,

By the halls where your wise in council

The passion of fools have stayed, —

That your brothers beyond the waters 225

May revere and love your name,

That your children in all your borders

May be shielded from woe and shame, —

By the stars in your crown of splendor
By the stripes that your country bind, 230
Give Peace the rule within Freedom's home,
God's angel to bless mankind."

Then, as paused that voice majestic,
The answering music rang
From the blending chords of the silver harp, 235
And the host responsive sang.
They poured through the aisles and arches
With a gay and glad acclaim,
And tears with their mirth were mingled,
As they echoed that lady's name. 240
From sires on their staves that tottered,
From mothers that babes upheld,
From youths and maids with their arms en-
twined
One joyous chorus swelled.
And the hand of sober Order 245
Fell from her needless blade,



And the gladsome song that the warders
sang

To the harp sweet echo made : —

“ Lead us, thou lovely lady !

Our works and our wealth are thine ! 250

Lead till thou bind the lands in one,

And man shall be all divine.”

They stood and gazed at each other

Strong hero and lovely dame,

And the cheeks of each were glowing 255

With a strange and rival flame.

And lo ! By a burst united

Arose from the swaying crowd,

With hands uplifted and pleading eyes,

To Freedom a summons loud : — 260

“ Speak, Goddess, who art our country !

Speak and let discord cease !

For the hearts of men their pulse must hold

Till thou yield thee to war or peace.”

And the sound of that mighty yearning 265
 Drew tears from my inmost heart,
And my eyes were dimmed with a mist of
 care
 That I strove in vain to part.
And murmurs came through the darkness
 Now wrathful and now more calm, 270
Till they seemed to blend in a solemn strain
 Like an ancient minster psalm.
Then the vision passed from my spirit,
 As I rose to the daylight's call,
And looked in doubt on the world without 275
 Unknowing what fate might fall ;
And I saw how the earth was mantled
 With the winter's stainless fleece,
While the morning bells were chiming
 For the birth of the Prince of Peace. 280

